

Testimony for submission to the CT Judiciary Committee:

Dear Senator Winfield, Rep. Stafstrom and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I testify today in favor of Governor's bill #16. Cannabis prohibition has been a disastrous failure. It has torn apart millions of lives with arrests and the collateral consequences of convictions, put cannabis consumers and workers in danger, and failed to stop cannabis use.

Governor Lamont's bill (#16) presents a far more reasonable approach to cannabis: regulation to protect public health and safety and a focus on repairing harms done by prohibition.

I began my law enforcement career in 1995 as an officer for the Waterbury Police Department in Connecticut. I served a patrol officer, communications dispatcher, and field training officer before I was promoted to sergeant. In 2006, I was promoted to lieutenant and received training with the F.B.I. Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (L.E.E.D.A.) Institute and became an instructor of fair and impartial policing, human behavior, and civil complaints. In 2017, I became a captain and was assigned to the Professional Standards Division as its commanding officer.

Many prohibitionists predicted that Washington and Colorado would experience serious public safety problems when voters approved initiatives to regulate marijuana similarly to alcohol in November 2012. Eight years later, those predictions have not come to pass, and many law enforcement officials and regulators believe that things are going quite well. Adults have already spent billions of dollars buying marijuana from licensed retail stores instead of from illicit drug dealers, and limited law enforcement resources are now being directed toward serious crimes.

Listen to what my fellow law enforcement experts from Colorado and Washington have said about legalization and its impact on public safety. Former Correctional Officer, Former Sheriff's Deputy Carrie Roberts of Colorado said, "From a law enforcement and criminal justice reform perspective the legalization of marijuana in Colorado, both medical and adult use, has had a positive impact on the lives of citizens living in Colorado, as well as reducing the overall burden on law enforcement and our criminal justice system. In Colorado the total number of marijuana court cases fell from 39,027 in 2011 to only 2,036 cases in 2014. These individuals who were NOT arrested for marijuana offenses represent 36,991 human lives and families that won't be affected by the negative stigma and financial burden that a marijuana arrest can have. It allows these otherwise law-abiding Coloradoans to remain productive members of society, contributing their worth to the greater good of the state."

Washington State Gov. Jay Inslee and his Attorney General stated, "Our state's efforts to regulate the sale of marijuana are succeeding. A few years ago, the illegal trafficking of marijuana lined the pockets of criminals everywhere. Now, in our state, illegal trafficking activity is being displaced by a closely regulated marijuana industry that pays hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes. This frees up significant law enforcement resources to protect our communities in other, more pressing ways."

Government-published data, academic research, and the experiences of many law enforcement officials indicate that marijuana policy reform does not increase crime rates. Relying on statistics from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, peer-reviewed studies have analyzed changes after passage of both adult-use legalization and medical marijuana laws. Contrary to assertions made by some opponents of legalization, there is no compelling basis for claims that legalizing marijuana and establishing regulated markets undermines public safety.

It's time for Connecticut to end the harmful prohibition on cannabis and pass meaningful reform and regulation to protect the public health and public safety of its residents. I hope that the legislature will take action this year.

Respectfully,

Captain Lawrence Hunter (Ret.), Waterbury Police Department